

Happenings

Duo win Entrepreneur of Year Award

Astyra leaders lauded

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Kenneth E. "Ken" Ampy and Samuel S. "Sam" Young Jr. are seemingly doing the impossible in a terrible economy.

Bucking the worst recession in generations, the partners report their Richmond-based Astyra Corp. is doing a land-office business supplying skilled computer programmers and technology experts to undertake projects for major corporations.

At a time when so many other companies have slid into the red and are slashing payrolls to survive, Mr. Ampy and Mr. Young said Astyra finished 2008 with an extraordinary 60 percent increase in revenue to \$10 million and more employees.



Rudolph Powell/Richmond Free Press

Kenneth E. Ampy, left, and Samuel S. Young Jr. of Astyra Corp. proudly display the Metropolitan Business League's Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

they expect their expansion to continue this year.

"We know these are hard times. But companies still have work that has to be done, and that's why they call on us," said Mr. Ampy. "We provide the expertise they need."

In recognition of their success in extremely hard times, Mr. Ampy and Mr. Young are the joint winners of the Metropolitan Business League's 2009 Entrepreneur of the Year Award. In the past, the award had been only presented to an individual.

They received the prestigious honor Saturday night during the MBL's annual Awards and Membership Banquet. They were interviewed by the Free Press after the event. More than 500 people attended the \$100-per-plate affair.

The MBL continues to present its Entrepreneur of the Year Award as a result of a Free Press crusade. In 2002, the newspaper led a successful fight to prevent the giant accounting firm Ernst & Young from blocking the MBL from presenting its Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Ernst & Young unsuccessfully argued that only Ernst & Young was entitled to issue the award in Richmond, although the award name is widely used.

The company currently employs 16 people in its downtown headquarters, the honorees said, and adds on temporary contract employees to fulfill specific assignments for clients.

Last year, the company employed more than 200 such contract employees to assignments in eight states, Mr. Young said, up from 85 of those workers in 2007. Mr. Ampy serves as CEO and Mr. Young serves as president. They were the only employees when they launched full-time operations in 1997. Remarkably,

minority-owned businesses.

Astyra grew out of a friendship that began when the honorees were students at Old Dominion University studying computer science.

After school, they began a part-time, computer-support business while working full-time jobs in Richmond.

Six years later, they quit their jobs to launch their own venture. Mr. Young remembers each of them put up \$100, which was matched by Mr. Young's father, Samuel S. Young Sr., to start Automation Concepts. After struggling through several lean years, they changed the company name to Astyra in 2003 to create a unique brand.

"We started out to build a successful organization, not just a small business," Mr. Ampy said. "That's how we have operated. We believe we are strategically positioned to make that happen."

Other award winners

Other awards presented during the banquet: Lifetime Achievement Award: Langston R. Davis Sr., chief executive officer for Davis Brothers Construction Co. Inc.



Distinguished Service Award: Individual, Hugh F. Gouldthorpe Jr., above, senior vice president of Owens & Minor Inc.; corporation, Capital One. Award recognizes service to enhance educational and workforce development.



Trailblazer Award: Matthew Allen, above, of M. Allen Electric Co. and Dominion Resource Services Inc. for creating a successful business relationship.



Vision of Excellence Award: Larry B. Wooten, above, supplier diversity manager for MeadWestvaco, for helping to pursue the company's minority business strategy.



League Leadership Award: David L. Wilson, above, president of Pro-Tech Payment Systems for contributions to MBL.



Executive Program Scholarships: Jeffrey D. Moten, above left, president of Industrial Steam Cleaning of Virginia, and Derrick L. Alford, president, Fiscal Fitness Tax & Financial Services Inc.

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